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At United Nations, a Haven of Soviet Spies

NEW YORK

Why would a Soviet clerical worker arrive at a United Nations post fully briefed on the intricacies of New York's subway system?

And why would another routinely keep tabs on license-plate numbers of automobiles driven by FBI agents?

The better to spy. It has long been an open secret around the U.N. that the U.S.S.R. and other Communist-bloc nations use the organization's headquarters as a cover for a massive spy effort aimed at acquiring secrets from America and other countries.

The Soviet Union, Cuba and Eastern European Communist states now have about 1,500 people at the United Nations. The Federal Bureau of Investigation believes 500 are full-time cloak-and-dagger operatives.

While not all 800 Russians who work at the United Nations are spies, say authorities, all are obliged to help with espionage missions when asked. In a June 5 report, the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence noted: "All Soviets ... must respond to KGB requests for assistance."

Apart from maintaining its own army of U.N. spies, the KGB tries to

recruit Third World diplomats, influence world opinion and gather information. "They have KGB meetings right in the halls of the U.N.," says James Fox, head of the FBI's Soviet counterintelligence section.

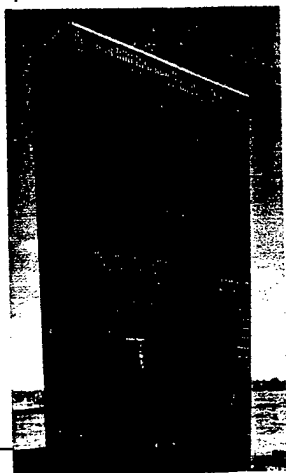
Arkady Shevchenko, senior Soviet official at the U.N. until his 1978 defection, has told of briefings at which the KGB gave him daily marching orders. In his book *Breaking With Moscow*, he says a key duty was finding jobs for agents. Thirteen of the 20 diplomats assigned to him at the mission, he says, turned out to be spies.

An assignment to the New York-based organization provides the ideal cover. U.N. Secretariat officials travel freely in the United States, unencum-

bered by restrictions imposed on other Soviet diplomats. And they carry special identification that does not disclose nationality.

Russians sent to the U.N. to spy are trained before leaving Moscow. FBI agents say that they are well informed about the subway. Its crowded cars and many stations make surveillance difficult. They also receive updates on license-plate numbers to help them spot trailing FBI cars.

Soviet spy nest: U.N. headquarters in New York.



Under the best of circumstances, it is nearly impossible to keep track of the Russians. Many live in an apartment complex owned by their government. They board buses each morning and get off at the U.N., melding into the flow of people. Many wear Italian or British suits and speak unaccented English.

Cagey courtship. American agents say that the primary target is information. But even more damaging may be the recruitment of spies among other delegations. One example: A prominent member of Norway's delegation was accused in 1983 of passing North Atlantic Treaty Organization secrets to a Soviet spy at the U.N. library. The Norwegian, it was alleged, had been recruited by the KGB years earlier.

"A Western official is less cautious if he's approached by someone from a friendly country rather than a Soviet," explains a Senate aide who worked on the Intelligence Committee's report. "That's a major source of information for the KGB."

Most U.N. spy cases never make the headlines. Instead, the FBI asks the State Department to declare an individual *persona non grata*. About 10 spies per year quietly leave the U.S. in this manner.

But it is a revolving door. As soon as one spy is sent back to Moscow or Prague, a replacement is on the way to the big building on the East River within a matter of days.

By RON SCHERER